

Testimony on behalf of the

**National Cattlemen's Beef Association**

With regard to

**HR 503 – The American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act**

Submitted to the

United States House of Representatives – Committee on Agriculture

The Honorable Bob Goodlatte, Chairman

Submitted by

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Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, my name is Paxton Ramsey, and I am a rancher and horseman from Devers, Texas. It is my pleasure to have the opportunity to be here today to talk about HR 503.

As a rancher and horseman, I am extremely concerned that we are sitting here today talking about this issue. Horses have been an important part of ranching and have helped us to work our cattle and build the U.S. cattle industry into what it is today. These animals are my tools and companions, and as such, I treat them humanely and give them the proper care and attention they deserve. I am not alone in this respect, but I am also practical. Some horses are unruly and unmanageable, become lame or sick, and are no longer able to be used as they once were. These are only some of the reasons that a horse may be unwanted, but regardless of the reason, they have to be dealt with.

One thing we have to keep first and foremost in our minds is that the processing of horses is just one of many different management options for horses. Others include adoption, rehabilitation, donation, and private purchase. Contrary to popular belief, there is not a group of thieves running around with black horse trailers, stealing horses, and taking them to slaughter in the dead of the night. On the contrary, these processing plants are regulated by USDA and in the case of my home state of Texas, brand inspectors are on hand to ensure that the horses are not stolen.

I am afraid that the elimination of processing as a management option poses a risk to horse welfare. Some owners of unwanted horses want to recapture some value out of their animal. Without the ability to recapture value out of a horse at auction, it is expected that some owners will not spend money to have animals euthanized and taken to a renderer. This means that unwanted horses could be neglected or abandoned, and those that are sick or infirmed could be forced to suffer from discomfort and pain, while the healthier ones will starve to death. Both starvation and a life of pain are much worse treatment than humane euthanasia at processing.

You have heard the horse welfare and veterinary experts on this panel today talk about their concerns on how to address the 70,000 horses that will have to be taken care of, the costs related to this care, the unintended mistreatment of these animals in non-regulated rescue facilities, and the environmental concerns of disposing of the carcasses. We agree with these concerns because HR 503 fails to address any of these issues. My biggest concern, however, as both a horseman and rancher, is the dangerous fact that this bill is based only on emotion.

The groups supporting HR 503 have had to resort to playing on peoples' emotions because they know that they have no factual basis to ban the processing of horses. Horse processing is regulated by USDA under the Humane Slaughter Act, and faces all of the scrutiny and inspections that other livestock slaughter plants do. The overall thought of horses being processed for food is not appetizing, but the process is not inhumane. Leaving the law in the hands of emotion is a slippery slope, and one that will affect all of agriculture. It is no secret that groups such as PETA and the Humane Society of the U.S. have made it their goal to end the consumption of meat and put animal agriculture out of

business. These goals are based on emotion and personal opinion, but not on science or sound animal production methods. HR 503 is exactly the same. It is legislating based on emotion, and the very fact that so much has been made of this bill has given these animal activist groups a cause to get behind, as well as helping them to raise money to increase their fights. If the House passes this legislation, we will be handing these activists exactly what they want, we will bolster their fundraising, and give them the precedent to come after all of animal agriculture. Many have said that this is not the case and the only issue here is horses. To not understand that this is a victory for the activists is blind and sets us up for even more fights as the Farm Bill approaches.

There are many cultures and groups around the world and in this country that don't care for the processing of cattle for beef. They have every right to their beliefs, but that emotion alone is not just cause to outlaw the processing of cattle. However, if HR 503 passes, that is exactly the ammunition that Congress will be giving the activists. Emotion should never be the basis of legislation because it will only result in bad laws. Emotion was one of the drivers of Prohibition, and we all know the mess that resulted in. Legislation should be based on sound science and fact. Emotion is what has brought us here, and I only ask that this Committee do its part to see that it goes no further.

Not only is emotion a terrible way to approach legislation, it is even more concerning when it affects private property. My horses are my property, just like my land, house, truck, and equipment. For Congress to regulate how I manage my property through a law based on emotion is unacceptable. I, along with the majority of ranchers in this country take excellent care of our animals. It is our responsibility as owners to make sure that they are cared for. I firmly believe that it is Congress' place to put into effect laws that regulate the care and penalize those who abuse animals, but not to regulate how I manage my property when the options I choose from are humane and based on solid animal production practices.

This Committee has been a leader on the issue of private property rights, and has done its best to address attacks on those rights such as the Supreme Court's Kelo decision. This is a similar attack on my private property rights, and worse yet, it is being driven only by emotion. This area has not been talked about much in this debate, but if you are going to tell a horseman what they can or can't do with their own property, you better have an excuse other than saying "well, just because some folks didn't like it."

Finally, and most concerning to me, is the abandonment of the legislative process in considering HR 503. As you all know, the legislative process is in place to prevent bad bills such as this from becoming law. The process gives you, as members of Congress, the opportunity to review legislation, gather input, and make informed votes in a timeframe you deem acceptable. It seems to me that this bill was cherry picked out of the process because it was not making the progress that some had hoped for. We are showing that if you squeal enough and make life hard enough for a few people, you can get what you want without true Congressional consideration. What does this show other activists with controversial pieces of legislation? It shows them that they can get their way if they only cry loud enough, regardless of the merits of their issue. The legislative

process is important in protecting the citizens of the U.S. from having any one person's personal agenda imposed upon them without considerable review, amendment, and debate. To have backroom deals replace the Committee process should be deeply concerning to all in this room.

With the approaching debate on the Farm Bill, the abandonment of the legislative process only opens the door to attacks from agriculture's many enemies to come after us and have a chance of winning. Everyday I face people who don't necessarily agree with the way I make a living. I would hate to think that these people, whose disagreements with me are based on emotion, could influence their elected officials enough to put me out of business. I look at actions here in Washington that are affecting and will affect my livelihood. Three of those issues are the full and permanent repeal of the Death Tax, the issue of manure being regulated under Superfund, and the potential regulation of agricultural dust by EPA. These issues will affect how I continue to make a living and whether or not my children are able to follow my footsteps. These issues, which have more behind them besides emotion have been debated for some time and have gone or are going through the legislative process. I have won some and lost some, and some I have not been able to get a vote on. These issues affect real life, but I've respected the process.

I appreciate the Committee's leadership on this issue and look forward to seeing each of you vote this bill down. By taking advantage of the legislative process to consider and possibly pass legislation based only on emotion, we are playing with fire. This legislation has real-world consequences that go beyond the thoughts of ponies running across the plains with the wind in their manes. This affects my business and the business of others with no sound basis, not to mention the employees at these plants who will lose their jobs. Yes, these are foreign owned corporations, but the workers are Americans trying to make a living and support their families. We should not tell them they can't eat or buy clothes for their kids just because someone does not like what they do for a living. As a horseman, I appreciate the oppositions' affection for horses, but I would encourage them to channel their energies towards rescuing as many of these horses at auction as they can, rather than manipulating Congress. There are ways they can be a solution to this problem, but they are going to have to step up and actually take some responsibility rather than play "armchair quarterbacks" and not get their hands dirty.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my views this morning and I, along with my fellow ranchers, look forward to working with you to defeat HR 503.

Committee on Agriculture  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Information Required From Non-governmental Witnesses

House rules require non-governmental witnesses to provide their resume or biographical sketch prior to testifying. If you do not have a resume or biographical sketch available, please complete this form.

1. Name: Paxton Ramsey
2. Business Address: 4740 Hwy 61  
Devers, TX 77538
3. Business Phone Number: (409) 790-0249
4. Organization you represent: NCBA + 7L Ranch
5. Please list any occupational, employment, or work-related experience you have which add to your qualification to provide testimony before the Committee:  
Manager + 4th generation of 102 year old ranch.  
Raise Quarter Horses + cattle
6. Please list any special training, education, or professional experience you have which add to your qualifications to provide testimony before the Committee:  
Student of agricultural Economics + Ranch Management  
at TCU + West Texas A&M
7. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list the capacity in which you are representing that organization, including any offices or elected positions you hold:  
Young Cattlemen's Conference Chairman  
for NCBA + As Policy Committee member

PLEASE ATTACH THIS FORM OR YOUR BIOGRAPHY TO EACH COPY OF TESTIMONY.

Committee on Agriculture  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Required Witness Disclosure Form

House Rules\* require nongovernmental witnesses to disclose the amount and source of Federal grants received since October 1, 2004.

Name: Paxton Ramsey  
Address: 4740 Hwy 61 Devers, TX 77538  
Telephone: (409) 790-6249  
Organization you represent (if any): NCBA & 7L Ranch

1. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) you have received since October 1, 2004, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract. House Rules do **NOT** require disclosure of federal payments to individuals, such as Social Security or Medicare benefits, farm program payments, or assistance to agricultural producers:

Source: \_\_\_\_\_ Amount: \_\_\_\_\_

Source: \_\_\_\_\_ Amount: \_\_\_\_\_

2. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) the organization has received since October 1, 2004, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract:

Source: \_\_\_\_\_ Amount: \_\_\_\_\_

Source: \_\_\_\_\_ Amount: \_\_\_\_\_

Please check here if this form is NOT applicable to you: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: Paxton Ramsey

\* Rule XI, clause 2(g)(4) of the U.S. House of Representatives provides: Each committee shall, to the greatest extent practicable, require witnesses who appear before it to submit in advance written statements of proposed testimony and to limit their initial presentations to the committee to brief summaries thereof. In the case of a witness appearing in a nongovernmental capacity, a written statement of proposed testimony shall include a curriculum vitae and a disclosure of the amount and source (by agency and program) of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) received during the current fiscal year or either of the two previous fiscal years by the witness or by any entity represented by the witness.

PLEASE ATTACH DISCLOSURE FORM TO EACH COPY OF TESTIMONY.